

## **HIGHLIGHTS BARSTOW FIELD OFFICE**

**California Desert District  
Advisory Council Meeting  
December 2014 Meeting**

### **Amargosa Vole Demographic and Disease Study – Habitat Enhancement Program**

**BLM Action:** In 2011, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) conducted a preliminary study to determine the current distribution of the Amargosa vole in the Tecopa area. A multi-year study is being conducted to further determine the extent of disease, vole genetics, and vole habitat needs. These studies have and will continue to provide information to guide management actions to help prevent the extinction of this highly vulnerable species.

**Agency:** BLM, Barstow Field Office (BFO), California Desert District Office, California State Office and Washington Office  
CDFW  
US Geological Service (USGS)  
UC Davis  
UC Berkley  
United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)  
Inyo County

**Contact:** Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** Recent results for the trapping efforts indicate that the Amargosa vole has approximately a 10% chance of being extirpated in the next year, and this rises to a probability of approximately 82% within the next 5 years if immediate management action is not taken. In response to the precarious nature of the Amargosa vole, the Amargosa Vole Team was chartered through the Desert Managers Group (DMG) in April 2013. The purpose of the Amargosa Vole Team (AVT) is to function as a work group to the DMG to provide a collaborative forum for BLM, USFWS, CDFW, and researchers to plan, coordinate, and implement actions that would prevent the extinction of the vole and ultimately result in its' recovery. Chris Otahal is co-chair of the AVT along with Russ Scofield from the Desert Managers Group. Due to the extreme vulnerability of this wetland species to extinction, it has become a discussion point in both State and Federal Drought team reports. At the Wildlife Society Meeting on January 27, 2015, there will be a full day session devoted to highlighting the on-going research being conducted on the Amargosa River and Chris Otahal will be making a presentation, and will participate as a panel member discussing BLM's role in managing the Amargosa vole.

The BFO in partnership with UC Davis, UC Berkeley, and USGS secured a \$25,000 NLCS Research Support Program grant to support Amargosa vole conservation efforts. The funding supported a pilot translocation project from a sustainable source

subpopulation into nearby marshes using a soft-release approach with monitoring to track animal movement, population size, disease, genetic structure, and impacts of predators and competitors prior to, during and post translocation efforts. Twenty Amargosa voles were captured and fitted with radio transmitters in July 2014. Half were left in place at the site of capture, half were moved to a marsh patch remote from the site of capture. These individuals were intensively tracked and monitored. Results will be provided in a forthcoming report (tracking data is still being collected at the time of this writing).

Also, as part of the NLCS Research Support Program grant, a study has been initiated by BLM and its' partners to help determine the best way to manage bulrush habitat in the marshes associated with the Amargosa vole. Data is currently being collected, but early results helped guide actions regarding the implementation of management actions being carried out at Marsh #1 (see below).

UC Davis, UC Berkeley, and USGS, with support from the BFO successfully secured a Section 6 Grant to provide funding for Amargosa vole habitat creation on private lands in Shoshone (a location where voles were found historically but are now extirpated) and research into a potential captive breeding program for the vole. The BFO recently conducted a cultural resource survey of the site in support of USFWS' NEPA review of the proposed project.

The BFO is also moving forward on a small habitat enhancement project to help secure and expand existing vole habitat in the "borehole" area in Tecopa. BLM worked with the CDFW and Inyo County to install a standpipe structure to prevent drawdown in water levels and degradation of vole habitat in this marsh. This action helped provide security of this population while the AVT finalizes design and permitting needs associated with installing a permanent check-dam to allow for long-term management of the site (check-dam funding of \$50,000 is a directed allocation from the BLM Washington Office). Recent efforts have resulted in the re-watering of a small portion of the "borehole" and it is hoped this will start the habitat recovery process. It appears from early piezometer readings that ground water levels have improved somewhat in this marsh. There are also initial signs of a positive habitat response since new bulrush sprouts are appearing in the previously "dead zone".

UC Davis has also initiated a predator study for the marshes used by the Amargosa vole. The researchers have established several photographic "trap" sites which are documenting the predators using the area. The researchers are also keeping visual records of predators on site. In a related action, the USFWS has provided a \$75,000 grant to USGS to continue habitat studies at Marsh #1 and to start conducting a predator exclosure study to determine effects of predation on voles.

In response to continuing detrition of one of the main habitat patches for the vole, the State Office provided \$42,000 in directed funding to initiate an "emergency rescue" program to establish a breeding colony of voles in captivity at UC Davis. The money will provide operational funds for three or more years. As of the writing of this report, 20 animals have been brought into this facility and all are doing well. In October and November 2014 there were at least five successfully breed individuals which produced

pups. Animals bred in captivity will ultimately be released back into the wild to supplement natural populations as appropriate and act as an insurance population against extinction in the wild. In late October 2014, UC Davis, CDFW, and BLM implemented an outreach effort to highlight these activities including UC Davis press release, several newspaper articles, NewsBytes article, BLM Daily article, and coverage on Facebook and Twitter.

The BFO is currently working with the BLM State Office to secure additional funding to expand the earlier genetics work to support the captive breeding program, expand the vegetation (bulrush) studies to better understand how to restore marsh habitat, and learn other critical information regarding the Amargosa vole.

The USGS team is preparing a report for BLM summarizing the demographic work to date (draft has been received) and is working on two journal manuscripts. The USGS team has informed BLM that their article on vole habitat needs has been accepted by the journal *Global Ecology and Conservation*. As a result efforts spearheaded by our partners at USGS (Dr. Rob Klinger), the Western Section of the Wildlife Society has agreed to devote an entire day-long Session to discussing the results of these various studies at their annual meeting in Santa Rosa, California, on January 27, 2015.

A recent publication includes: Caitlin N. Ott-Conn, Deana Clifford, Tammy Branston, Robert Klinger, and Janet Foley. 2014. *Pathogen Infection and Exposure, and Ectoparasites of the Federally Endangered Amargosa Vole (Microtus californicus scirpensis)*, California, USA. *Journal of Wildlife Diseases* (In-press).

### **Amargosa River Monitoring Studies / Management Actions**

**BLM Action:** The BFO is involved in various monitoring studies / management actions associated with the implementation of the draft Amargosa River ACEC/WSR Management Plan including:

- 1) Amargosa Niterwort Population Monitoring
- 2) Sensitive Bird Species Spot Mapping / Cowbird Management Program
- 3) Tamarisk Control Efforts
- 4) SCAN Monitoring
- 5) Fish Monitoring

**Agency:** BLM, Barstow Field Office  
BLM, California State Office  
Amargosa Conservancy  
The Nature Conservancy  
Point Blue (PRBO)  
US Geological Survey  
California Department of Fish and Wildlife  
UC Davis  
United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

**Contacts:** Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** The list above represents a summary of the various management studies / management actions which are being carried out in support of the draft Amargosa River ACEC/WSR Plan. These projects are multi-year and BLM is currently working with partners to secure out-year funding for these programs.

The Ventura USFWS Office secured a \$162,000 grant through the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Federal Endangered Species Act Traditional Section 6 Program to support the Sensitive Bird Species Spot Mapping / Cowbird Management Program for the 2013 and 2014 field seasons and provide funding to produce a multi-year summary report of the program to date. The Amargosa Conservancy secured funding to expand monitoring to include Willow Creek for the 2014 effort – this is an area which had not been covered under previous survey efforts. The Nature Conservancy, Amargosa Conservancy and PRBO, in coordination with BLM, recently submitted a Neotropical Bird Grant application which would expand upon our ongoing tamarisk removal and bird monitoring program to include monitoring of Willow Creek and fund focused surveys for Yellow-billed Cuckoo along Willow Creek. Bird surveys have been completed for the 2014 season, and a report from PRBO will be forthcoming. One exciting initial finding is that researchers estimated, conservatively, that 250 young fledged in 2014 within the greater Tecopa-Shoshone area. This is very exciting in that there were near zero nesting success in 2006-2008 prior to the tamarisk treatments / cowbird management efforts.

Through a partnership with USFWS, the Barstow Field Office secured a \$35,712 grant through the USFWS's Desert Fish Habitat Partnership Program (DFHP) to support Phase 1 (2013-2014) of the Tamarisk Removal/Habitat Enhancement program targeting habitat improvements for the Amargosa speckled dace and Amargosa pupfish (this funding includes support for on-going fish monitoring as well as habitat improvement). The BLM California State Office provided additional fisheries funding in FY 2014 to conduct one mile of fish surveys on the Amargosa River. This will provide follow-up data to the baseline surveys carried out in 2010. Field work and surveys by USGS on the one mile of river was conducted in October 2014. BFO is currently working with the State Office to secure directed funding in FY 2015 to expand fish surveys to encompass an additional four miles of the Amargosa River.

In support of the DFHP Grant discussed above, James Gannon, BLM Prescribed Fire and Fuels Specialist, acquired funding to treat tamarisk on the Amargosa River. BFO is also working with the Amargosa Conservancy to focus funding from their Amargosa Trail Grant on additional tamarisk treatment on Willow Creek – a tributary to the Amargosa River. Along with the funds from the DFHP grant, we anticipate treating more than 50 acres of tamarisk this fiscal year.

Staff from the BLM State Office conducted the fourth annual survey of the Amargosa Niterwort population in the Death Valley Junction area in August. The numbers and density observed this year were much lower compared to 2010 and 2011. Site

conditions were much dryer this year as compared to previous years and this likely resulted in the lower numbers and densities. Additionally, BFO repaired fencing in August 2014 to help maintain protection of this niterwort population.

### **Desert Tortoise Recovery Implementation Team Activities**

**BLM Action:** The BFO is cooperating with the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office of the USFWS to implement the Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan. The BFO is providing representation for the BLM on the West Mojave Recovery Implementation Team (RIT) to set recovery action priorities.

**Agency:** BLM  
USFWS  
Various County, State and Federal Agencies

**Contact:** Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** In December 2012 there was a multi-agency meeting in which the ground work for the production of the Recovery Action Plan was discussed. The Recovery Action Plan (v.1) was provided in March 2013 for initial RIT and management review. BFO staff attended a Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group (MOG) meeting in Las Vegas on March 11, 2014. The primary focus of this meeting was updating managers on RIT efforts undertaken to date and for managers to discuss the direction and next steps for the RITs.

On July 1, 2014, a RIT WebEx was conducted with BLM Wildlife Biologists Larry LaPre and Chris Otahal in attendance. There was some discussion regarding the next steps on producing Version 2 of the West Mojave Implementation Plan – in particular on how to move forward on revisions based on “dissenting” opinions on priority action items. There was also discussion on how to effectively track desert tortoise conservation actions as they are implemented by the various participating groups.

The Desert Tortoise Recovery Office solicited the development of proposals for implementing high priority action tasks outlined in the Implementation Plan. BFO submitted a proposal for route signing and restoration which would assist with the recovery of the Desert Tortoise as well as help implement conservation actions for the Lane Mountain Milkvetch. BFO also provided feedback regarding the “dissenting” opinions issue. These topics will be discussed during the next scheduled meeting of the RIT on November 19, 2014.

### **Silurian Valley Wind and Solar Facilities**

**BLM Action:** Processing two separate applications filed by Iberdrola Renewables:

- 1) A 200 MW wind farm (67-133 turbines) including a new project substation with an

overhead 287 kV transmission line involving 15,849 acres of public lands. Key issues are visual landscape, impacts to historic trail and railroad, golden eagles and Department of Defense flight corridor (HRIZ). Project is required to comply with the Bald and Golden Eagle Act.

2) A 200 MW solar PV project, including a new project substation with an overhead 1.5 mile 287 kV interconnection line on 7,218 acres of public lands. Solar proposal lies within a variance area per the Solar PEIS Record of Decision (ROD). A Solar Variance determination is required by the Solar PEIS; requires BLM National Director's concurrence to process further.

Both projects propose potentially connecting into the LADWP Mead-Victorville 287kV line (Boulder corridor). Project Feasibility, System Impact and Facility studies for both projects have not been completed – interconnections are unconfirmed. Proposed projects would be located 10 miles north of Baker, CA and east of State Scenic Highway 127 (between Silurian Dry Lake and the historic Boulder Utility Corridor).

**Agency:** BLM, Barstow Field Office and California Desert District  
National Park Service (NPS), Death Valley National Park and Mojave National Preserve  
United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Pacific Region and Ventura Office  
State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)  
Department of Defense (DOD)  
California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)

**Contacts:** Joan Patrovsky, Realty Specialist/Project Manager, Barstow Field Office  
Jeff Childers, Project Manager, Renewable Energy Coordination Office (RECO)

**Status:** **Wind:** Revised Plan of Development (POD) received and deemed adequate to complete the application. Application has been forwarded to the California Desert District RECO for environmental processing. Local DOD coordination office advises reevaluation has deemed site to be within a High Risk Impact Zone (HRIZ) to the R-2508 flight corridor. Project area is transected by the National Historic Old Spanish Trail and historic Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad; historic visual landscape and cultural concerns; potential golden eagle and avian corridor concerns; and concerns have been raised by NPS, USFWS, Tribes and California SHPO. The Applicant has requested the project remain in pre-application status until a decision on the variance for the solar project is complete.

**Solar:** On November 20, 2014, the BLM determined that the Silurian Valley Solar Project was not in the public interest and denied the ROW application in accordance with 43 CFR 2804.26(a)(2). The denial of the ROW application was based on information collected through the variance process as outlined in Appendix Section B.5 of the Solar PEIS ROD and summarized in a Variance Determination issued by the BLM California State Director.

## **North Peak Wind Farm**

**BLM Action:** EON Climate and Renewables, Inc. filed an application for a 120 MW wind farm. This proposed project consists of up to 42 wind turbines, access roads, an off-site operations office, and a project substation with a 220kV interconnection line to the SCE Desert View Substation. Location borders the Towns of Apple Valley and Lucerne Valley, San Bernardino National Forest, Juniper Flats and the OMYA Mine.

**Agency:** BLM, Barstow Field Office  
United States Fish and Wildlife Service  
County of San Bernardino  
California State Fish and Wildlife, Natural Resources Division

**Contact:** Joan Patrovsky, Realty Specialist/Project Manager, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** The Application has been withdrawn due to issues with grid power interconnection availability and costs. The Test grant relinquishment is pending.

## **Soda Mountain Solar Project**

**BLM Action:** The BLM received a right-of-way (ROW) application from Soda Mountain Solar, LLC to construct, operate, maintain and decommission a solar photovoltaic (PV) power plant facility along with the necessary ancillary facilities. The project is proposed on 4,397 acres with the solar field occupying approximately 2,691 acres. The project is located along Interstate 15 (I-15), South of Blue Bell Mine Road, about 6 miles southwest of Baker, California, and 52 miles northeast of Barstow, California. More specifically the project would include solar array fields; access roads; collector lines; a substation with switchyard and interconnection; ancillary buildings; groundwater production, test, and observation water wells; water tanks; a water treatment and storage facility; brine ponds; warehouses; fencing; berms; other infrastructure; and laydown areas. The project would be accessed by the existing Rasor and Blue Bell Mine roads. New internal roads would be constructed among collector lines, substation, arrays and sub arrays, and other ancillary facilities. The interconnection to the proposed substation and collector lines from the arrays would be via underground trench, including underground trenching of I-15.

**Agency:** BLM, Barstow Field Office  
United States Fish and Wildlife Service  
County of San Bernardino  
California State Fish and Wildlife, Natural Resources Division

**Contact:** Jeffery Childers, Project Manager, Renewable Energy Coordination Office (RECO)

**Status:** A Draft Environmental Impact Statement was released in November 2013. The BLM and the County are drafting the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Report (EIR). A Final EIS/EIR is expected to be issued this winter.

## **Coolwater Lugo Transmission Line Project**

**BLM Action:** Southern California Edison Company (SCE) is proposing a new high-voltage (220/500-kV) transmission line extending approximately 64 miles from SCE's existing Coolwater Generation Station Switchyard located in Daggett, California, to SCE's existing Lugo Substation in Hesperia, California. The proposed Coolwater to Lugo Transmission Line Project (CLTP) would traverse approximately 16 miles of public lands managed by the BLM, with the remainder on private or other lands within San Bernardino County. Approximately 47 miles of the transmission line would parallel or be within existing overhead utility rights-of-way (ROWs) and designated transmission corridors with the remaining 17 miles requiring a plan amendment to designate a new transmission line corridor. The proposed project also includes new substation facilities to support transmission line termination and new telecommunication facilities for a Special Protection System to maintain transmission system reliability. The new 500/220/115/12-kV Desert View Substation, which would initially be constructed as a switching station, is southeast of the Town of Apple Valley, CA. The new telecommunications lines would extend from the Gale Substation to Pisgah Substation and from the new Desert View Substation to the Apple Valley Substation, traversing approximately 6 miles of BLM-managed lands. The majority of the telecommunications fiber optic cable would be installed on existing poles. The project would include installation of approximately 373 new single and double-circuit 220-kV and 500-kV transmission structures, and removal of approximately 168 structures associated with the existing Lugo-Pisgah 220-kV transmission lines No. 1 and No. 2; construction of 25 miles of new roads; upgrades to 17 miles of roads; temporary use and construction areas; and approximately 215 setup areas for conductor pulling and splicing.

**Agency:** BLM, Barstow Field Office  
California Public Utilities Commission  
United States Fish and Wildlife Service  
County of San Bernardino  
California State Fish and Wildlife, Natural Resources Division

**Contact:** Jeffery Childers, Project Manager, Renewable Energy Coordination Office (RECO)

**Status:** The Scoping period closed in early September 2014 and the agencies are working on alternatives and analysis for the project. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Environmental Impact Report are expected to be issued this winter.

## **Coolgardie Mesa and West Paradise Proposed Withdrawal**

**BLM Action:** The BLM filed a withdrawal application for 10,094.03 acres of public lands located in San Bernardino County, California. The proposed withdrawal is for the protection of two botanical conservation areas known as Coolgardie Mesa and West Paradise. The Lane Mountain Milkvetch is a federally listed endangered species found in these conservation areas, and has a limited geographical range.



**Agency:** BLM, Barstow Field Office  
US Fish and Wildlife Service, Ventura Office

**Contact:** Joan Patrovsky, Realty Specialist, Barstow Field Office  
Katrina Symons, Field Manager, Barstow Field Office  
Liz Easley, Lead Realty Specialist, California State Office

**Status:** On August 27, 2014 a Federal Register Notice (FRN) was published which temporarily segregates 10,094.03 acres of public lands from location and entry under the mining law, subject to valid existing rights, for two years. The FRN also announced the 90-day public comment period on the proposed withdrawal application.

A public meeting was held on Tuesday, October 14, 2014 at the BLM Barstow Field Office. Written comments on the proposed withdrawal application may be sent to the attention of the Field Manager, Katrina Symons, by US mail to 2601 Barstow Road, Barstow, CA 92311 or email at [blm\\_ca\\_coolgardie\\_mesa\\_withdrawal@blm.gov](mailto:blm_ca_coolgardie_mesa_withdrawal@blm.gov). Written comments must be received on or before November 25, 2014.

### **California Historic Route 66**

**BLM Action:** Barstow to Needles Corridor Management Plan (CMP)

**Agency:** BLM, Barstow Field Office, Needles Field Office, and California Desert District Office

**Contact:** Doran Sanchez, Partnership Outreach/Development Specialist, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** The BLM, California Historic Route 66 Association (CHR66A), and third party contractor Lardner/Klein Landscape Architects, are preparing a CMP for the segment of the historic Route 66 within the BLM California Desert District that extends from the western city limits of Barstow, California to the eastern city limits of Needles, California. CMP information is available at <http://www.route66ca.org> and the BLM Barstow and Needles Field Office websites.

The CHR66A, Lardner-Klein and CDD CMP core team members conduct weekly strategy calls to exchange information, plan briefings with elected officials and key constituent groups, and identify any data/research needed for the CMP. The core team has held four webcasts and continues to solicit public comments on preparation of the CMP. The Draft CMP is anticipated to be published in mid-to-late January 2015 for a 30-day public review.

The BLM, CHR66A and Lardner-Klein will schedule a fifth webcast in mid-February to solicit additional edits/comments/revisions on the draft CMP. The final CMP is expected to be issued by April 2015. Upon completion of the CMP, the BLM and CHR66A will seek a National Scenic Byway (NSB) designation for this segment of Route 66.

**Note:** A NSB designation is not expected to impact/prevent ongoing maintenance of existing ROWs adjacent to Route 66. This point will be specifically addressed and clarified in the draft CMP. Additionally, the BLM and stakeholders will have an opportunity to submit additional comments/fine-tune the language in the CMP, if needed, during the public comment period.

### **Congressionally Designated Johnson Valley Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) Recreation Area**

**BLM Action:** Johnson Valley OHV Recreation Area

**Agency:** BLM, Barstow Field Office and California Desert District Office  
Department of Navy, Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC)

**Contact:** Katrina Symons, Field Manager, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** The BLM continues to work cooperatively with the MCAGCC, Twentynine Palms, California to implement Public Law 113-66.

The Resource Management Group Charter was finalized in June 2014. Public meetings and field trips have been held on May 7 (Yucca Valley Community Center), August 16 (Lucerne Valley Community Center) and September 6 (field trip to proposed company objective areas). The meetings and field trip held to date were to inform the public of the changes in land use, as well as solicit input from relevant State agencies, off-highway vehicle interest groups, event managers, environmental advocacy groups and other interested parties.

The MCAGCC does not plan to conduct military training in the Shared Use Area (SUA) in Fiscal Year 2015 so BLM is proceeding with the processing of special recreation permits for events proposed within the SUA. Additionally, boundary signs are being installed along the SUA/Exclusive Military Use Area interface.

### **West Mojave Plan, Route Rehabilitation and Signing**

**BLM Action:** The BLM is continuing work on the development of the West Mojave Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Programmatic Agreement, and Biological Assessment.

The BFO is also working with the Transition Habitat Conservancy (THC), Farmworker's Institute of Leadership and Development (FIELD), and the Friends of El Mirage to implement signing of open routes, route closures, and restoration efforts in support of the West Mojave Plan (e.g., El Mirage Subregion, Black Mountain Subregion, Calico Mountain Subregion), as well as enhancing habitat for sensitive resources in the BFO area. Funding for the route signing and rehabilitation includes the State of California's OHMVR grants, Renewable Energy Action Team (\$50,000; to address Golden Eagle mitigation requirements associated with the Abengoa Solar

Project), and BLM.

**Agencies:** BLM  
Transition Habitat Conservancy  
Farmworker's Institute of Leadership and Development  
Friends of El Mirage

**Contacts:** Edythe Seehafer, WEMO Project Manager, Barstow Field Office  
Craig Beck, WEMO Assistant Project Manager, Ridgecrest Field Office  
Carl Symons, Field Manager, Ridgecrest Field Office  
Ashley Blythe, Archaeologist, Ridgecrest Field Office  
Katrina Symons, Field Manager, Barstow Field Office  
Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, Barstow Field Office  
Tim Hough, Wilderness Specialist, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** The BLM is continuing to work with the State Historic Preservation Office on the development of a Programmatic Agreement. Pursuant to the Endangered Species Act, BLM has initiated consultation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and is continuing work on the development of a Biological Assessment. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement is scheduled to be released by February 2015 with a 90-day public comment period.

Signing and restoration work is ongoing in the El Mirage and Calico Mountains Subregions. A BLM sponsored Wild Corps crew is currently working at the Black Mountain Wilderness conducting signing and restoration work along the wilderness boundary. On-the-ground work funded by the renewable energy action team is anticipated to begin in December 2014.